Part I:

Contexts and methods:

approaching the Word (*sabadu*)

Chapter 1

Introduction: changing the focus from Being to Action

> I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation... This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?
>
> – Michel Foucault (1988: 14)

1.1. Interpreting the Gurū's teaching

With regard to the Sikh Gurū Granth Sāhib (1604),[1] why should an academic work on it if not to be transformed by his labours? Does the task of studying its teachings only concern correct classification, as though foreign views are cultural artefacts that can be taken and represented in another language, regardless of their context and independent of their function? Such questions dogged my reading of scholarly work on the GGS, for a certain engaged *praxis* seemed noticeably absent. This thesis, in aiming to understand Gurū Nānak's (1469–1539) teachings, then starts from a position that argues that his philosophy is inextricably bound to a *praxis* that implicates anyone who should read its pages.[2] Thus, whilst the subject matter of this thesis is Gurū Nānak's poetic corpus located in the GGS, its focus is not therefore the written words *per se*, but on their communicable import or religious teaching (*guramati*). The aim is to address how Gurū Nānak's words, as recorded in the GGS, can 'speak' beyond their Panjabi context to a Western, diasporic audience.

In developing a diasporic hermeneutics of Gurū Nānak's teaching, this study is the first of its kind.[3] Whilst there have been previous interpretations of *guramati*, all have assumed translation and interpretation to be unproblematic and quite separate from any message given in the text. This thesis, however, aims to achieve an understanding of Gurū Nānak's compositions in respect of their religio-philosophical instruction in English, making its locus the complex tension between the written words of the text and their interpretable meaning within soteric contexts alien to the text's Panjabi origin. This understanding of the interpretive tension occurs across a trajectory of translation and recontextualisation spanning epochs (15th to 20th centuries),

[1] The authoritative *Damdama* edition of the Ādi Granth (1604), 'the Primordial or First Book', later understood as the Gurū Granth Sāhib (c.1708) and hereafter referred to as GGS, is used. Manuscripts of this version are dated from the time of the tenth Gurū, Gurū Gobind Singh (1666–1708), see Mann 1996. Its language, written in the *Guramukhi* script, is called the 'Sacred language of the Sikhs' (SLS) following Shackle 1983.

[2] See McLeod 1996: 68–147 for a detailed historical account of Nānak's life.

[3] Some of the issues are discussed by Nikky Singh 1992; 1993; 1995; 1997; 1998. There are, however, serious misunderstandings and confusions, especially of Gadamer's and Heidegger's thought, in her works.

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languages (SLS/Panjabi to English), religious traditions (Indian/Sikh – Semitic/Christian), and their respective socio-cultural practices as well as geographies. However, this complex trajectory cannot be easily polarised between East and West, given the imposition of British rule and the developing colonialist and orientalist discourses that occurred during decisive junctures of Sikh revival and reform. For example the influential Singh Sabha movements (1873–1920) have been noted for their internalisation and (naive) use of imperial codes and classifications in expressing what the Gurūs taught.[4]

It is argued then that there is no longer a choice, if there ever was, between traditional *praxis* and an academically theologised Sikh–ism (*theoria*).[5] Given the advent of British colonisation and modernisation, both Singh Sabha and academic formulations of Sikh-ism are underpinned by the same post-Enlightenment, modernist assumptions that place the classification and systematisation of beliefs (*theoria*) over religio-cultural practices (*praxis*). Philosophical expositions, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias of Sikh–ism (*theoria*) gain currency in such constructions over Sikh *praxis*: singing (*kīratanu*), philosophical reflection (*kathā*), recitation (*japu*), remembrance (*simaraṇa*) and meditation (*dhiānu*).[6] Thus, despite the polarised debates between some Western academic and Sikh scholars along the lines of the supposed dichotomy between reason and faith, it can be argued that most scholarly output has led to an abstract theologisation of Gurū Nānak's teachings, which have largely ignored the relevance of *praxis* to that teaching, as though one need only study the GGS as a text apart from its tradition(s).[7]

As British imperialism dominated the political scene of the Panjab, so too did British-Christian notions of reason and doctrine inscribe themselves over and above Sikh practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Influenced by the Singh Sabha movement, later Sikh Scholars[8] and Western academics, despite their contraposed positions, both understood the GGS as a 'book of doctrines' open to all to view, i.e., over an understanding of it as a 'sound-instrument', for instance, to memorise and transform consciousness through chant, song and daily application. Both assumed the same epistemic and hermeneutic ground. Indeed Smith (1996) has argued that the main feature in the crisis of modernist thinking is its persistent

[4] See Singh, Arvind-pal: 1995; 1998; 1999 and Oberoi: 1994.
[5] Throughout the thesis the differences between the Aristotelian terms *theoria* (theoretical activity) and *praxis* (moral and political activity), and more acutely *techne* (technical making) and *phronesis* (ethical acting) are central. *Theoria* and *techne* represent an abstract and universal knowledge removed from action; *praxis* and *phronesis* relate a particular and practical knowledge that cannot be known independent of action.
[6] See McLeod:1995 and ed. Singh, Harbans 1992 as examples of this bias.
[7] See McLeod (1996, 1997) and the apologetic work of writers like Dalgeet Singh (1994).
[8] Such as those scholars associated with the International Centre of Sikh Studies in Chandigarh, noted for their stance against textual study and interpretation. See Mann 1996: 49.

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privileging of *theoria* over *praxis*. Yet the context of *praxis*, which includes the oral/aural modes of singing and listening, provides a different hermeneutics than that which is derived from the theoretical abstraction of doctrine, which privileges the eye, its silent reading and presumed objectivity. The rational eye of 'observation' assumes a uniquely different orientation from the practitioner's emotive ear and voice. And the former through the colonial encounter came to dominate the latter, causing specific transformations in attitude and approach where an alien sensorial value system came to be internalised. These changes occurred largely through Christian missions and English education as well as through indigenous self-representation within the new forms of mass communication, especially print, which had been instigated by British modernisations.

The thesis thus starts with a critical assessment of previous studies on the GGS and Gurū Nānak, which are found wanting given their uncritical re-writing of its and Gurū Nānak's thinking into a particular philosophy, theology or ideology determined by visual and theoretical reflection upon the GGS as reproducible text. Such re-writings occur under a particular Enlightenment paradigm in which certain hermeneutic assumptions operate to simplify and delimit Gurū Nānak's teaching into a clear and unambiguous 'system' of thought.

In the Sikh diaspora such ideological constructions are further compounded by the semantic alienation that second and third generation Sikhs feel from the GGS and its teachings. How to heal that rift is also a matter of some controversy – learning modern Panjabi is not sufficient in comprehending the SLS of the GGS. However, given the reality of historical situatedness and the necessity of engaging with the text within the terms of current prejudices and conditionings, it becomes more fruitful to explore such Western avenues as those opened by philosophical hermeneutics which agree *praxis* should lead *theoria*. The approach here then, mindful of the translation across boundaries, is one that conflates Western interpretive theory with an early 17th century text of the Panjab, via the notion of a unique and nondualistic form of *praxis*: Western *phronesis* (ethical making) and Eastern *upāya-kauśalya* (skill-in-means). This will redress the bias toward a purely theoretical and theological Word which ignores an existential *praxis* of the Gurū Word (*sabadu*). Using the GGS as the base, it is the latter *gura-sabadu praxis* that must be approached if the GGS is to be understood beyond the mimesis of Semitic monotheism. Such an aim is desirable because this mimesis yields a reading of the GGS that is inherently blind to its nondual teaching. Gurū Arjan's seal, for example, given at the end of the AG, reveals a striking nonduality between a dark world which is to be 'crossed', from the unreal (*saṁsāru*) to the real (Brahman), and the same world being simultaneously the expanse of Brahman:

tama saṁsāru carana lagi tarīai sabhu nānaka brahama pasāro.

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(GGS: 1429, Mis: M5: *Mundāvaṇī*: 1.5).
Having attached to Your feet the dark world is (to be) crossed;
O Nānak everything is the expansion of Brahman.

Thus the idea of crossing from bondage to liberation is cryptic and ambiguous. Such nondual statements call into question the naive belief that texts are flat and all passages are to be interpreted from one ideological viewpoint. It also reflects at least two levels of understanding that are not easily reconciled. When the GGS is read for truth-statements alone, independent of the context of practice and 'traditional' interpretive genres, then such 'contradictions' as the above cause confusion. Contrary to such a one-sided approach, the following chapters seek to recontextualise the GGS by re-immersing it into the interpretive context of 'living truths' and 'engaged *praxes*'. How this process is socially developed, critiqued and argued entails the study of South Asian notions of 'hearing' scripture and 'remembering' tradition (*śruti*, *smṛti*), divine and nondual language (*śabdabrahman*, *śabdādvaita*), sound (*mantra*), word (*śabda*/*sabadu*), name (*nāmu*) and music (*rāgu*), dependent upon such practices as yogic meditation (*samādhi*) and discrimination (*vīcāru*), repetition (*japu*), feeling (*bhāva*), singing (*kīratanu*), effortlessness (*sahaju*), and loving devotion (*bhakti*). The text here is understood as an inseparable fusion between what is written (*theoria*) and what is practised (*praxis*).

The exegesis of Gurū Nānak's teachings cannot be fixed to words alone, relegating practice to mere reading: *guramati* demands understanding which in turn demands interpretation and application to everyday life. It is thus the unfixable Word communicated or interpreted through the words of the GGS that is of concern here. From Gurū Nānak's own arguments it would seem that the literal word can be possessed but the teaching of the Word can only be practised. Thus an abstract hermeneutics of Gurū Nānak's words is not enough, a contextual hermeneutics of 'Word-*praxis*' is required for an understanding of his hymns. This requires changing the focus from epistemic representation (be it informed by 'rational' academia or community 'faith') to one of interpretive engagement and cross-cultural translation. In short, a shift is required from an endless theorising of an onto-theological Being, to the problematics of nondual Action expressed in an existential *praxis*.

1.2. GGS as canon or commentarial *praxis*

Without such a shift the GGS is subsumed under the Western notion of an inscribed canon (scripture), whilst its own indigenous context reflects interpretive *praxes* embedded in oral traditions. It is necessary therefore to investigate the nature of the GGS as a religious writing.

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The Protestant Reformation and the expansion of print technology in Europe, allied with an academic and scientific culture, led to a strong historical bias toward text and literacy in the West, which was predisposed to locate the core of any religion as textual and rational (King 1999a: 35–61). These developments led to the concomitant judgments on other religions which lacked 'revealed writing' as being 'primitive' and 'archaic'. It is not however the Western perceptions of canonicity that are problematic but the academic and orientalist framing of such notions. The reliance on post-Enlightenment, modernist presuppositions conflated with the natural science methodologies, as well as the consequences of imperialism and colonialism, have resulted in many misperceptions of other, non-Semitic sacred texts (King 1999a: 44–46). This ethnocentrism has been rightly challenged: for example as seen in Staal's movement away from a Semitic emphasis on orthodoxy (right doctrines) to the Eastern centrality of orthopraxy (right practice) in the study of Indian texts (1996: 389–90).

The developed Semitic notion of a canon or sacred book (Torah, Bible, Qur'ān) of revealed beliefs, then, is an unhelpful model by which to study Eastern 'texts' (Vedas, Upaniṣads, Tripiṭaka, Bhagavadgītā) that are tied to particular rituals, 'non-meaning' *mantras*, chants, dances, dramas, and various soteric paths. However Tracy (1998: 383–93) notes the inherent differences concerning textuality and revelation even within the Semitic traditions, where from an Islamic perspective for example, the Jewish and Christian Bibles are open to error because they are involved in 'concursive' revelation allowing human engagement (with God or the Holy Spirit), rather than a revelation based on 'direct dictation' which is independent of human competence and social circumstance. Likewise, one could argue that the GGS is quite different from Hindu and Buddhist texts on grounds of a similar idea of 'dictation'. Not insignificantly, Gurū Nānak employs an Islamic term for the divine (Ar. > Per. *khasama*[78]) on this particular point:

> *jaisī mai āvai khasama kī bāṇī taisaṛā karī giānu vai lālo.* (GGS: 722, Ti: 5, 3, 1.1).
> As the utterance of the Lord comes to me, so do I utter its knowledge, O Lālo.

Gurū Nānak, at least, seems to believe there is no compromise in 'his' revelations. Furthermore, the nature of Gurū Arjan's later Primal Book (AG), being consciously styled to rival the Semitic 'Books', 'speaks volumes' for the notion of a 'Sikh canon'. In fact that very Indo-Islamic context in which the GGS was developed as a scripture in likeness and distinction to the Vedas and the Qur'ān, reveals the complexity and richness of the Sikh scripture:[9]

[9] Gurū Nānak's vocabulary reveals an awareness of a diversity of religious writings: Veda (*bedu*[53]=*vedu*[16]), Purāṇa (*purāṇa*[24]), Śāstra (*sāsatu*[8]=*sāsatra*[5]=*sāsu*[1]), Smṛti (*simriti=simmriti*[9]), Āgama (*āgama*[1]), as well as the Qur'ān (*kurāṇu*[41], *kateba*[11]) and the Sharī'at (*sarā*[2]).

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kali paravāṇu kateba kurāṇu.
pothī paṇḍita rahe purāṇa. (GGS: 903, RaA: 1, 7.1–2).
In the Kali Age, the accepted Book is the Kurāṇu,
The learned Brahmins, their Hindu religious book and Purāṇas are left behind.

Yet the specific critique by the Sikh Gurūs themselves of these texts, and hence their status as revelation, should guard one from reading too much into any such parallels. Although Gurū Nānak accepts the prominence of Islam and the Qur'ān, he is not any more than the Siddhas and Sants before him persuaded by scriptural religion. For Gurū Nānak there are innumerable scriptures, yet none that know Reality:

asaṅkha garantha mukhi veda pāṭha. (GGS: 3, JP: 17.3).
Countless the Scriptures and the recitations of the Vedas in the mouth.

beda katebī bhedu na jātā. (GGS: 1021, MrS: 2, 6: 1).
Neither the Vedas nor the Islamic scriptures know the Mystery (of God).

What is paramount for Gurū Nānak is the practical knowledge of the Divine, not His revelation *per se*:

beda kateba karahi kaha bapure naha būjhahi ika ekā. (GGS: 1153, BhA: 1, 6.2).
O how can the Vedas or the Islamic scripture be of avail to them when they know not the unique One?

Scripture is dispensable and secondary to understanding Gurū Nānak's Divine, since understanding may arise from any writing, any field of experience, because it is 'through His power that all exists':

kudarati veda purāṇa katebā kudarati saraba vīcāru. (GGS: 464, AsV: 3, 2.3).
Through His power are the Vedas, the Purāṇas and the Islamic scriptures;
through His power is all thought.

Thus the content of the GGS implies a teaching that the 'Divine' can be known regardless of scripture; in an important sense all revelation is moreover understood as being provisional, and thereby Gurū Nānak's ideas reflect a broader vision for locating the Word, which itself reflects a greater sensitivity to the social and human contexts of *praxis*.

Even though both the Qur'ān and the GGS are understood as recitations, '*qur'ān*' and '*japu*' possess quite different contexts of meaning and practice; unlike the former, the latter has a highly developed philosophy of the power of sacred sound and concerns various practices involving mantric utterance. Their forms are also quite different: the Sikh scripture is almost entirely expressed through lyric, whereas the Qur'ān's elevated but abrupt style is better described as 'hortatory' (Shackle 1995b: 153). Unlike the Qur'ān, the GGS, being anti-ritual, does not give directions for

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pilgrimage rituals or legislate laws, nor is it understood as eternal and uncreated, and nor is it perceived as a copy of a pre-existent scripture that resides in heaven like the Islamic *umm al-kitāb*.

More importantly there is a great difference between the Semitic figure of the Prophet and the Indian notion of the Guru. Unlike Moses, Gurū Nānak does not come with the commandments of God in tablets of stone, nor does he receive his revelation through intermediaries like the angel Jibrā'īl/Gabriel. The religious mediator (*ṛṣi*, Buddha, Kṛṣṇa, Gurū) related to the Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh 'texts' often assumes equal if not greater authority than the scripture, something that is not the case with Muhammad and the Qur'ān, nor the Prophets in the Jewish tradition of the Torah, though Jesus as the Word in John's Gospel in the New Testament provides an interesting parallel. However it is the specific identification of the Buddha with the Dharma (especially in the Dharma-kāya, the absolute body of the Buddha), and the Gurū with the Gurū Granth Sāhib, that marks a salient difference in how revelation is understood within these two latter traditions; that is as being provisional despite coming from a transcendental or timeless realm or Being.

In view of the importance of the guru-figure in relation to both text and devotee in many Indian devotional traditions, given that the 'soteric path requires a *guru* not a text' (Clooney 1992: 48), it can be seen how interpretive commentaries (*bhāṣyas*) attain a level of importance unseen in Western traditions. Mumme (1992: 69) notes 'it is remarkable how metaphysics in Indian thought are so tightly bound to interpretive strategies'. The primacy of metaphysics in the West is countered in that 'from an Indian perspective, an orthodox metaphysical system may be only a by-product of a proper hermeneutical approach to scripture' (Mumme 1992: 70).

From this perspective the idea of a fixed canon within the Indian context can seem arbitrarily codified and delimiting, for canons ignore the need for the guru, and it is gurus who above all write commentaries. Henderson (1991: 47–8) has acknowledged the omission of interpretive commentarial traditions in the academic study of scripture due to the sole emphasis on the book as canon. Furthermore others have noted that the integral relationship between tradition and text evident in *sūtra*-commentaries should lead to an understanding of scripture in these Indian contexts as 'tradition-text' (Deustch 1989: 169). The idea of a closed canonical text is therefore a misnomer in the *sūtra-bhāṣya* traditions, where each tradition appropriates the *sūtra* in its own way, revealing 'hermeneutic' traditions that are characterised more out of a mode of explication, restatement, and practice than faith in the discovery of the 'absolute textual Truth'. Flood writes that 'the category of "sacred writings" therefore tends to have more fluid boundaries within Hinduism than in most other traditions' (Holm & Bowker 1994: 71).

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Given this Indian cultural tendency to fluidity, it would not be incorrect to interpret the works of the second, third, fourth, fifth and ninth Sikh Gurūs not only as 'revelation' (*gurabāṇī*) from the cosmic True-Gurū, but also as expert commentarial elaborations and creative restatements of Gurū Nānak's thought by human Gurūs, to be imitated by the commentarial evidence provided by the *Janamsākhī* literature in the seventeenth century, as well as the interpretive traditions (*praṇālīs*) of the eighteenth century.[10] However, during the colonial and Singh Sabha eras, the Semitic interpretation of the GGS as a fixed canon comes to be the dominant, orthodox view. Though, of course, this orthodox view is itself simply the most (politically) 'successful' interpretive tradition.[11] During the reform period not only are the interpretive traditions frowned upon but also the scripture of the tenth Sikh Gurū, the Dasam Granth, loses favour (Oberoi 1994: 90, 93).

The tradition-text context of the GGS is worth revisiting not only because it redresses the balance in viewing the GGS only as a 'complete' and 'closed' Book, but also because it points to various levels of interpretive engagement that the GGS itself seems to demand. Indeed Henderson notes the different hermeneutical strategies relating to the interpretation of South Asian texts. One such strategy sees *upāya* (means) as a 'hermeneutic of accommodation', whereby sages 'whose words are recorded in the classics or scriptures keyed their teachings to different pedagogical levels in order to meet the needs and correct the views of different classes of disciples or auditors'(1991: 169). According to Henderson, such an activity is not confined to Buddhist and Vedantic traditions alone.[12]

The consequence of such a hermeneutic of accommodation is that the idea of a single absolute interpretation of truth becomes untenable. Absolute truth cannot be univocally stated when the truth has to be interpreted and adapted to suit different individual predispositions. Furthermore, other strategies or exegetical understandings relay the fact that conflicting concepts and contradictory practices are not all directed to the same group of people or type of person, nor do they extend beyond a certain time-cycle, since different truths are appropriate for different ages (*upāyas*). Thus the setting up of a canonical Truth independent of interpretive commentaries within many Indian traditions is highly dubious, given the inherent sensitivity to changing historical contexts.

Smith also notes the hermeneutic significance of the Buddhist concept of skilful means (*upāya kauśalya*) as a textual strategy, used by some Buddhists to accept as authentic the *sūtras* of other groups, but at a lower level applied to their own selection

[10] See Siṅgh, Taran 1988 for details of these Panjabi interpretive traditions, which are not relevant to the English diasporic focus here.
[11] See Siṅgh, Taran 1988 who classes it as the last of the seven interpretive traditions he studies.
[12] He cites examples of Christian, Muslim and Neo-Platonic exegetes (1991: 171: fn.113).

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of *sūtras*, which were seen as containing the 'full' truth (1993: 162). However, Smith also acknowledges other Buddhists who went beyond an instrumentalist interpretation of upāya, to understand its more important implications that 'all scriptures, all visions, all interpretations, are limited in this way, one's own as well as others; that every outlook held by human beings, even if of transcendent origin or divine inspiration, is contingent' (1993: 162). The provisionality and *praxis* of the tradition-text dovetail well with the notion of upayic strategies, and these observations are applicable to the Sikh scripture, which acknowledges an inclusive and existential notion of the 'revealed Word'.

However perhaps the most important features of textuality within the Sikh tradition are the deeply influential and changing ideas of the Gurū and the Word (*sabadu*). For example there are many important developments of the notion of Gurū that integrate with, and develop the notion of, the Word. These range from the idea of the True-Gurū (*satiguru*) as 'Hari',[13] as human Gurū (*Gurū*), as Word (*gura-sabadu*), as Book (*gurū-granth-sāhibu*), and eventually as Community (*gurū-panth*). This thesis concentrates on the first three senses (*satiguru/hari*, *gurū* and *gura-sabadu*), since the latter two occur long after Gurū Nānak's time.[14] It is therefore Gurū Nānak's words, as an example of the *praxis* of the Gurū's Word, that form the basic 'text' of this thesis, not the GGS as a canon of the written Word. This key point requires elaboration.

Tradition states that before Gurū Gobind Siṅgh died he bestowed the mantle of the True-Gurū upon his loyal followers, as well as upon the GGS. Thus the True-Gurū would now manifest in the form of the book, the GGS as the 'Gurū'-Granth, and the initiated community of the Khālsā would in turn become the 'Gurū'-Panth. That which since Gurū Nānak's time had been unlocatable and formless as the Word (*sabadu*) and the True-Gurū (*satiguru*), thus became located in the two forms of community and text after the Tenth Gurū. Despite statements about the omnipresence of the Word throughout the GGS, it came to be understood by later tradition that the Word was manifest somewhat exclusively in these two forms alone. Yet for Gurū Nānak it would seem that no human (*gurū*), text (*gurū-granth*), community (*gurū-panth*), or practice (*rahit-marayāda*) could be identified exclusively with the *gura-sabadu praxis* – for the latter represents a process open to all in every way. It may thus be argued that the later developments of an exclusive 'revelation', and a sole focus on the written word, would have been keenly criticised by Gurū Nānak. Yet contemporary Sikh rhetoric, with its imitation of Singh Sabha discourse, seems bent on claiming the uniqueness and

[13] The Vaiṣṇava term for the supreme Being '*hari*[630]' will replace the Semitic term 'God' throughout, since it is Gurū Nānak's most frequent term for the Divine. Other names will also be used where appropriate to reflect Gurū Nānak's own diversity of expression.
[14] Significant changes in the later Sikh Gurūs' works occur within the contexts of a growing Sikh Panth amidst increasing Mughal and Afghan oppression (Hans: 1998).

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exclusive nature of their text, tradition, path and practice. Unlike the later 'codes of conduct' (*rahitnāmas*) that developed after the Tenth Gurū's death during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Gurū Nānak's thought is not built upon lists of injunctions.[15] Rather, it is argued that it teaches an understanding, largely informed by a nondual and upayic ethic, which is unformulated to the extent that it is to be continually reapplied to life's diverse experiences.

There are then three specific shifts in the understanding of the Sikh Gurū's Word (*sabadu*) and its written expression (bāṇī): from Gurū Nānak's *praxis* of the Gurū's Word (*gura-sabadu*), to Gurū Arjan's collection of the Gurū's speech/hymns (*gura*-bāṇī) in one text (Gurū Granth Sāhib), culminating in the idea of the Gurū-Book (*guru-granth*) and its worship amongst a Gurū-Community (*gurū-panth*). These developments in understanding and practice are continuous and overlapping, and not necessarily exclusive, nor dismissive of previous understandings. Indeed, both the Divine communication of the Word (*gura-sabadu*) and the written word (*gura*-bāṇī) are understood as the True-Gurū:

> *sabadu gurū surati dhuni celā.* (GGS: 943, SG: 44.1–2).
> The Word is the Gur*ū* and mindfulness of its music is the disciple.
>
> *bāṇī gur gurū hai bāṇī vichi bāṇī ammritu sāre.* (GGS: 982, M4: Nn: 4, 5.1).
> The word is Gur*ū*, Gur*ū* is word, within the word is the essence of Nectar.

That is to say, even ordinary speech and writing (*bolu*, *bāṇī*) as well as divine communication of the Word and Name (*sabadu*/*nāmu*), in fact everything personal and impersonal, are equated with Hari/Brahman:

> *sabhu kichu āpe āpi hai dūjā avaru na koi.*
> *jiu bolāe tiu bolīai jā āpi bulāe soi.*
> *guramukhi bāṇī brahamu hai sabadi milāvā hoi.*
> *nānaka nāmu samāli tūṃ jitu seviai sukhu hoi.* (GGS: 39, M3: Sr: 63, 30, 4).
> He Himself is everything, there is no other or second one.
> As He causes me to speak, so do I speak, when He Himself causes me to speak.
> The word of the *Guramukhi* is Brahman, through the Word does the meeting occur.
> O Nānak, remember the Name, through serving which happiness occurs.

However a trajectory of obvious ritualisation in Sikh *praxis* of the Word (*sabadu*) can be charted, simplified as a shift from an originally omnipresent Word related to everyday activity, to a practice which locates the Word within a text (GGS/*bāṇī*) and specific orthodox community to the exclusion of other texts and communities.[16]

A concomitant shift can also be traced from a direct engagement with the Word, with comparatively minimal mediation from a human Gurū (given the growth of the

[15] See McLeod 1984: 71–85; 1987; 1997: 109–33.
[16] For example the Nihangs and their *Sarab Loh Granth* which is placed on par not only with the GGS but also the *Dasam Granth*. See Bhogal 1996.

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Sikh Panth), to one where the major mediation of the Divine occurs exclusively through the Gurū Granth Sāhib as a text available to all as print, 'guiding/witnessing' not only an individual's spiritual journey, but, by the intervention of Singh Sabha reforms, everyday life-cycles and rites of passage of community members. To summarise, these shifts can be tabulated with reference to Mann's (1996) work on the evolution of the GGS from the Harsahai/Goindval *pothīs* to the Kartarpur/Damdama texts[17]:

	Gurū Nānak 15/16 cens.	Gurū Arjan 16/17 cens.	Gurū Gobind Siṅgh (18) 19/20 cens.
Texts:	Early Gurū-writings Harsahai, Goindval *Pothīs*	Ādi-Granth Kartarpur Manuscript	Gurū-Granth-Sāhib Damdama Printed Text
Word:	*sabada* – (*bāṇī*) Word as *praxis*	*sabada* – *bāṇī* Word as text	(*sabada*) – *bāṇī* Word as book
Focus:	*gura-sabadu* Gurū's Word	*gura-bāṇī* Gurū's hymns	*gurū-granth* Gurū's Book

As the focus here is on Gurū Nānak's perspective and hymns this study is based only on the first interpretive frame (column), which emphasises the *praxis* of the Gurū's Word (*gura-sabadu*).[18] This frame demands a notion of scripture as an intertextual commentarial praxis, given the number of Sikh and non-Sikh authors in the GGS, rather than the later understandings of the GGS as canon.

1.3. Problems in translating a textual praxis across cultures

As part of the much broader bhakti movement, the Sikh way (*panth*) follows a *nirguṇa-bhakti*[19] path. Centred on a rejection of ritualised religion, be it Islamic or the elite Brahmanic culture espousing Vedic authority, it is largely anti-caste and reliant upon

[17] Sikh tradition relates the key stages in the evolution of the GGS, with three major Gurūs: Gurū Nānak (Harsahai), Gurū Amardās (Goindval) and Gurū Arjan (Kartarpur/AG). See Mann 1996: 12, 43, who states 'I therefore feel strongly that the first compilation of the Sikh sacred text was accomplished during Guru Nanak's time and quite probably under his own direction' (1996: 49).

[18] However the approach here uses the GGS because as Mann (1996: 48) notes, 'the corpus of Gurū Nanak's and Gurū Amardas' hymns is essentially identical in the Goindval Pothis and the Kartarpur Pothi,' the latter being equated with the Adi-Granth/Damdama version.

[19] 'Loving-devotion' to a Formless/Attributeless Being. *Nirguṇa-bhakti* is less ritualistic and iconic, and more impersonal than *saguṇa-bhakti*, as the latter is dedicated to an Attributed Being with a visible Form, and as such encourages an excited emotional response, often allowing dance and frenzy – something that is frowned upon in the more solemn emotion of Sikh hymnal praise (*kīratanu*).

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its own revealed Word/words (*gurasabadu*/*gurabāṇī*) and egalitarian socio-soteric ethics. The 'Sikh path', however, veers away from rigid, external systematisation. Indeed Gurū Nānak would probably have as many critical remarks to make about Sikhs following contemporary Sikh-ism as he did about Hindus following Vedic ritual and ascetic extremism, as well as Muslims practicing an 'externalised' Islam. For Gurū Nānak it was how one practised one's beliefs that gave them justification, not the beliefs in themselves. And this *praxis*, it is argued, is central to the interpretation of his hymns. There are, however, a number of studies that begin to think scripture beyond the confines of Western-Christian cultural Imperialism, where 'much more significant hermeneutical insights may emerge from the traditions themselves than from an appeal to some unifying, extra-traditional, theoretical construct' (Timm 1992: 10). When the focus of study moves beyond the text-as-writing to text-as-*praxis* then there are important implications for cross-cultural translation and interpretation.

Moving beyond Müller's romantic orientalism and the overly 'textual', modernist 'history of religions' approach, and picking up the leads given by O'Flaherty (1979), Levering (1989), Timm (1992), Smith (1993) and Sugirtharajah (1999), this study develops the latter group's arguments to include contemporary hermeneutic theory. However, whilst one may agree with the above authors that the 'native exegetes' and their 'strategies of interpretation and translation' – Timm's 'traditional hermeneutics' (1992: 3) – need to be acknowledged, one must also recognise that studying 'the text in its context' (O'Flaherty 1979: viii) may actually extend that same orientalist desire to know and control the Other, since it remains independent of self-transformation and relies on a transcendental subjectivity that 'objectively' re-presents the GGS. The point is not to valorise the 'indigenous' context as the source for true knowledge, but as a site that needs to be adequately and appropriately engaged with, given one's own socio-linguistic historicity.

Thus the approach here goes further in recognising that indigenous interpretive notions still need to be allied with contemporary Western thought, if the diasporic context is to be respected, and if one is to aspire to Foucault's and Gurū Nānak's ethic of *praxis*. After all, the academic intention is not only to understand the text in context, but to do so beyond that indigenous context. Yet Timm's conclusion stops short of this dual goal, stating that 'the Other deserves to be encountered through its own categories of understanding, instead of forced into a culturally foreign framework' (1992: 300). He thereby reproduces the phenomenologist's aberration by asking 'how much of our own worldview can or should we suspend in our quest for an authentic understanding of the Other?' (1992: 301). A desire to understand the Other '*in its own terms*' (Timm 1992: 299) is then still an imperial, though a subtle, hubris. His 'collaboration with the native exegete' (Timm 1992: 5) is therefore skewed and remains

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deceptive, for understanding, as Gadamer argues, demands that one interact with and relate the Other to one's own context, language, knowledge, and even prejudices, in such a way that neither the Western nor the indigenous contexts remain unchanged. If a text is a bicycle, what is gained from merely observing it and imagining motion? Nor does riding it necessitate conversion.

The method here puts into question the Western academic and his/her discourse without naively assuming its transcendence. Furthermore neither the text nor the contexts (Western and Eastern) are taken to be either homogenous or static. The point is not only to listen to the voice of the native exegete (Smith 1982: 43ff) or develop a 'sensitivity to the Other' (Timm 1992: 10), but to bring oneself along with one's attendant cultural baggage into the picture and to negotiate the ground rules for an appropriate engagement which is the prerogative neither of the academic nor the 'native'. Timm's *Texts in Context* ignores the complexity of a cross-cultural translation where neither the Western nor the Eastern context dominates but both are actively brought together in a hybrid and new context.

However Timm (1992) does align himself with the work of Smith (1993) and Levering (1989), especially with the latter's concern for 'dynamic polarities and relationships' with regard to scriptural activity (1989: 11–13). Levering claims that 'scripture' is a relational term, which 'refers to the kind of relationships that people enter into with these texts' (1989: 2), and she rightly points out that too little reflection has been given to what it means 'for human communities to "scripturalise" (produce scriptures)' (1989: 2). When the focus has shifted from the text to human activity (as Smith 1993: 18 also argues), then the necessity for a changed focus where *praxis* leads *theoria* becomes apparent. This is reflected in Levering's 'modes of reception', which range from the informative to the self-transformative (1989: 13–15). It is this focus on the human engagement with the text that this thesis develops in respect to the GGS. However it is careful not to homogenise unwittingly the 'Sikh community', the 'human' or the 'Divine' by acknowledging the often differing interpretations of the GGS from person to person, from sect to sect, from generation to generation, from Panjab to Diaspora, and from language to language.

Just such a charge of homogenisation could be levelled at Smith's major work on scripture (1993) if it was not for his acknowledgment of human *praxis*. Smith states that the 'true meaning' of any religious text 'is not one meaning but is a dynamic process of meanings, in variegated and unending flow. The true meaning of scripture is the solid historical reality of the continuum of actual meanings over the centuries to actual people' (1993: 89). Smith argues that '*there is no ontology of scripture*. The concept has no metaphysical, nor logical, reference; there is nothing that scripture finally "is"', for what is at issue for Smith is not 'texts of scripture that are to be understood and

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about which a theory is to be sought, but the dynamic human involvement with them. That engagement has constituted an historical process, still continuing', and therefore the whole process, 'might be more truly apprehended if conceived not as nouns but as some sort of adverb, a mode of relating to the world' (1993: 237). He concludes by stating that scripture is best understood as being trilateral: 'referring to a relation – an *engagement* – among humans, the transcendent, and a text' (1993: 239).

Yet nowhere does Smith dwell upon the need for different hermeneutical strategies of translation for each tradition *he* looks at. Nor does he reflect upon the possible inseparability of these meanings from their particular practices. This makes his appeals for a universalist 'transcendent' and a universal notion of human scripturalising both decontextualised and empty. It is of little surprise then that Smith's comparative study of scripture in general does not focus on the GGS in particular. Indeed he sees little if any development in *his* conceptualising of scripture as regards the GGS beyond that of the Qur'ān: 'Qur'an and Bible have served as models for subsequent instances [of scripture] but there has been no advance in form since the Qur'an' (1993: 48). This is a curious and anti-historical remark that jars with his 'unending flow' of historical development.[20] Furthermore Smith's tendency to historicise the transcendent and humanise the religious text (scripture is a 'human' activity) reveals an Enlightenment assumption that the ground of knowledge is the rational human. Smith therefore fails critically to question the 'human' and his varied engagements with the text, and offers no criteria by which the different, often politically motivated, interpretations and engagements with the text are to be assessed. He seems to overlook the contradiction inherent in conceptualising an abstract, universal category of human scripturalising, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the immense diversity of human engagement throughout the centuries.

Smith's 'general theory' would seem to arise from a confusion between *theoria* and *praxis*, and the unproblematic assumption and use of universalised categories like 'transcendent' and 'truth' – 'a reader may at times get from a sentence a closer approximation to truth and reality than its formulator grasped' (1993: 230) – as though truth is constant and independent from human expression. This is further confused by, and married to, a changing and quantitative view of truth as historical:

> … we spread them out [true meanings of religious texts] before our minds over the array of the historical process to arrive at the total meaning thus far, as a coherent concept.... Thus we leave out nothing that Muslims have seen in it [Qur'ān]. Why should we? Only prejudice, not historical fidelity, can omit the nuances and the reverberations that Muslim reading of it has evinced (Smith 1993: 89).

[20] Indeed one could argue that the Sikh case unites the Christ-Word figure with the revealed Qur'ān through their *gura-sabadu* and *Ādi-Granth* in the Gurū-Granth-Sāhib; a revealed scripture that is still a speaking 'prophet-guru'.

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Thus despite emphasising the location of scripture in human engagement with texts, it is curious that Smith excludes himself from this process and pretends that somehow gathering together other people's meanings from their engagements will help him to formulate a general theory of scriptural activity (for the rest of us). He does this without, and actually regardless of, Muslim *praxis* – for Smith knows all that Muslims do about their text; the lack of *praxis* does not limit access for him. Smith therefore seems to miss his own point about scripture being a human activity. The 'nuance' Smith leaves out in his theorising, is entering the historical (hermeneutic) circle of *praxis* himself, i.e., acknowledging his own situated prejudices but without addressing Foucault's concern about academia.

If it is a specifically 'religious' type of human activity that makes a text scripture, then Smith's 'scholarly activity' only deals with the text as document and not as scripture. He therefore fails to ask the crucial Foucauldian question his own argument demands: what meaning about scripture is valuable that does not arise from an engagement with it? What purpose does a general *theory* of scripture serve in comparison to localised *praxes*? Furthermore, Smith's objectification of historical and interpretive processes into objective facts elides the inherent problem between interpretation and fact which Nietzsche among others has highlighted. Far from being 'concrete' and linearly 'accumulative', history is someone's selective story from a necessarily prejudiced viewpoint.

The works of Smith, Levering, and Timm point to an acknowledgment of the importance of indigenous self-understandings of 'traditional hermeneutics'. However, these approaches, whilst providing a step beyond an overtly orientalist standpoint, do not go far enough to significantly displace those orientalist assumptions that elide the complexity of cross-cultural translation. All tend to romanticise and assume that the indigenous context remains relatively 'static' to the 'all-seeing eye' of academia, and thereby all continue the orientalist vision based on an imperial sight which can see enough into the indigenous context to control it, rather than feel ethically obliged to engage with it in a self-transforming way. The first of Graham's observations on the 'relentless dominance of textuality in the scholarly mind' is worth remembering here.[21]

Though I am not observing, nor seeking a collaboration with, a 'native exegete', since I am a 'diaspora Sikh', in many respects I am seeking a conversation with myself in order to understand myself. This internal and personal discourse involves a double movement to anthropologise the 'Indian' self whilst simultaneously resisting the myth of abandoning my Western identity and thinking, as well as re-asserting my Panjabi-Sikh identity in the face of alien classifications and obedience to a master language. In

[21] 'The suspension of the subjective emotions and personal engagement in favour of objectivity and visual verification' (Graham 1989: 142).

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short there is a tension of translation and appropriation, of innovation and conservation, not only within and between Sikh traditions, but also within the diasporic Sikh psyche: the limits and possibilities of translation accompany every thought that tries to think in between cultures. With regard to the GGS, the lie that an Asian text can be meaningful to a British-Asian context without some form of interpretive translation has been held an unwritten truth for too long. Different languages, cultural systems and values, as well as different technological media, become central factors in translating the 'message' of the GGS, beyond, and even within, the Panjab.

Given that this thesis seeks to translate Gurū Nānak's thought into English, the influence of Western ideas requires not only to be acknowledged but also incorporated into the method, as indeed they inhabit the psyche of many English-speaking diaspora Asians. Thus whilst the indigenous interpretive tools and ideas are of consequence, they need to be appropriately used alongside Western methodologies if a balanced inter-cultural 'dialogue' is to ensue. This requires an understanding of what the object of study actually is. The argument is therefore circular: once each position is seen as historically situated, it becomes unclear at which point the circle of East-West hybridity and intercultural translation is to be entered. Securing an appropriate method before the object of focus can be seen is not how the dynamics of understanding operate; it would seem that the approach is simultaneously, and by necessity, personally worked out and even integral with discovering the object of focus, given the cyclical nature of understanding-in-translation and the complexity of diasporic discourse in general. No beginning point is as simple, neutral, singular and accessible, as pre-Heideggerian Enlightenment philosophers determined. Rather the post-Imperial and plural contemporary context demands that Descartes' foundational or 'Archimedean point' (1969: 149) is now contested, and re-visioned as temporal rather than transcendental, multiple and mirror-like, reflecting the presuppositions of academia as much as its object of study.

The argument here for a 'contextual', as opposed to a 'traditional' or 'vernacular', hermeneutics seeks not simply to substitute indigenous terms and hermeneutical strategies for Western ones, but rather demands that the terms and strategies from each tradition are appropriately selected and juxtaposed in the context of translation. This way the hybrid nature of contemporary diaspora can be acknowledged, and discussion about key ideas and terms can be grounded in the actual practice of cross-cultural translation. Both translation and interpretation need to arise from the East-West context of the task in hand. There is the need then for every interpretation to occur in conjunction with the practice of translation, which in turn demands reflection upon the field of translation studies itself. Otherwise claims in

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English about Gurū Nānak's teachings float disturbingly free from translation and slip into a realm of (mis)interpretation. It makes very little sense to separate hermeneutics from translation as though translation were merely a mechanical and neutral process awaiting expert commentary. Nor is it satisfactory to wholly identify translation and interpretation as though the translation itself speaks the 'truths' of the original text to any and every context. Both views of fanciful interpretation and naive translation are present in Sikh Studies. By acknowledging the profound relation between translation and interpretation, an attempt is made here to ground the interpretations in the complexities of cross-cultural translation. For, without an anchor in the detail and ambiguity of Gurū Nānak's vocabulary and verse, interpretation about his teachings cannot but become highly selective, simplistic and politically driven.

Therefore those Western and Eastern terms and themes that seem the most appropriate with regard to the task of cross-cultural translation and interpretation, as well as resonating with the religio-philosophical content of the GGS, are employed here. The Western ones start with Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, which incorporates Aristotle's notion of a self-transformative ethical *praxis* (*phronesis*). These are tied to Benjamin's views on translation as an 'afterlife' that listens to the echo of the words of the original language but does not feign 'equivalent' re-presentation. By focusing on the word as the base-unit of translation, Benjamin is able to reflect the foreign-ness and diversity of the original text in the target language, and thus ensure that the detail of translation is not overlooked in the claims of interpretations. Finally these Western themes are juxtaposed with North-Indian concepts of language and action in general, and a nondual and soteric *praxis* in particular.

1.4. Themes of engagement: nonduality and skilful means

Having established the locus of this study as the *gura-sabadu praxis*, it is important to explore a hybrid approach to this 'enacted and made Word' given the specific 'linguistic split' in the Sikh diasporic psyche, as well as the general differences between British and Sikh cultures. Accompanying Gadamerian hermeneutics, Smith's *praxis* over *theoria*, Aristotle's *phronesis* and Benjamin's translation theory, then, are three indigenous themes that parallel the key issues of: nonduality, *upaya* and the two understandings of language-use (divine Sound (*śabdabrahman*) and nondual Word (*śabdādvaita*)). Such juxtapositions should help sensitise and critically inform an approach to cross-cultural interpretation of a soteric Word-*praxis*.

Within most Indian contexts the leading metaphor of this *praxis* is that of an existential movement across the 'turbulent sea of life', which brings into view the major paths (*mārgas*) of the various Indian traditions: of gnosis (*jñāna*), action (*karma*) and loving-devotion (*bhakti*). The existential movement along any one, or indeed a conflation of, these paths supports the emphasis upon a *praxis*-movement and

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reaffirms the centrality of the metaphor of the raft and its crossing as appropriate interpretive models. An upayic *praxis* is founded upon a nondual philosophical base which conflates the Divine with the world (*saṃsāra* with *nirvāṇa* in Mahāyāna Buddhism; *saguṇa-brahman* with *nirguṇa-brahman* in Hindu Sant and Sikh traditions). Therefore, unlike dualistic religious philosophies, these nondual perspectives assume that revelation is not only timeless and transcendental but also integral with the existential world. In this respect the transient world and its languages may also speak simultaneously of a transcendent Word, reflecting a skilful means thematic.

There is evidence to suggest a Sant and Sikh engagement with the upayic trope. Barthwal's classic study on the *nirguṇa* Sants concludes that their teaching implied the use of skilful means:

> One ought, therefore, to take the help of any device he likes but should always try to rise above it by experience or realisation to the Absolute State. (Barthwal 1978: 85).

In this Sant context (which includes Gurū Nānak), Rama is merely 'a "prop" to help one to a higher realisation' (Barthwal 1978: 84), a raft to make the nondual crossing. Paltu Sahib, an eighteenth century Sant reflects both nondual and upayic themes transcending attachment to particular beliefs:

> At times his words are humble;
> At times he sits up proud...
> At times he says the world is true;
> At times he holds it false.
> At times he talks about the Lord with Form;
> At times he shows the Formless. (*Palṭu Shabdāvalī*; Gold 1987: 45).[22]

In his study on the Hindi Sants of the North Indian tradition, Gold states that the 'guru' employs skilful means, despite also acknowledging important differences in the Hindu and Buddhist contexts (1987: 189):

> If the guru seemed completely perfect, he would be inaccessible to the disciple, beyond human relationship. The guru's apparent weaknesses stem from his desire to help; using skilful means, he mirrors the disciple's own flaws. (Gold 1987: 183)

There are further examples of the Sant use of the upayic theme in Vaudeville's works even though she herself is not aware of them. Whilst Vaudeville is correct to note that *upāi* (Skt. *upāya*), 'takes in medieval and modern Indo-Aryan languages the meaning of "effort" or "knack"' (1974: 196, fn.5), she does not see that the upayic theme itself remains largely intact. Hence Shackle's definition for *upāu/i* as 'scheme, device, means; effort' (GNG: 280) is more inclusive and accurate. Furthermore, though Vaudeville

[22] Importantly, this seems to have its source in a Buddhist *sūtra*, see Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* IV.96–96; Lopez 1993: 2.

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(1993: 288) translates Gurū Kabīr's verse – 'the Jogi has found the trick (*jugati*; Skt. *yukti*)' – she misses the obvious link between *jugati* and *upāya* as 'means' not 'effort'. Finally, though Gurū Nānak does not himself employ the term *upāu/i*, he does use the term *jugati*[47] ('way, method; scheme, manner; way of living; mystical way, union'). What secures the point of an overlap between Sant and Sikh use of the upayic theme is that both use these terms in an upayic context, and furthermore the later Sikh Gurūs actually use the term '*upāi*'. It is argued then that there is a thematic continuity between the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of skill-in-means or skilful means (*upāya-kauśalya*), which implies a nondual philosophical base, and Gurū Nānak's *jugati*, as well as the later Sikh Gurūs' *upāi*:

> Whatever righteous, upright, outstanding, or wholesome life is conceived and manifested in the world, all that has come forth from the Bodhisattva, has been brought forth by him, has spread from his skill-in-means.
> (*Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* 13; Conze 1978: 44).

> *balu hoā bandhana chuṭe sabhu kichu hotu upāi.* (GGS: 1429, Gurū Gobind Siṅgh).
> (My) power has returned, I am freed from the bonds, everything becomes a means (*upāi*).

> ...whatsoever be well spoken, all that is the Word of the Exalted One..
> (*Aṅguttara Nikāya*; Hare 1935: 111–12).

> *saccu gura sabadu jitai lagi taraṇā.* (GGS: 1040, MrS: 20, 3, 4.2).
> Truth is the Gurū's Word, by attaching to which one is ferried across.

> Even boys, in their play,
> Who, either with reed, wood or pen,
> Or with the finger-nail,
> Have drawn the buddha's images,
> All such ones as these...
> Have all attained the Buddha-way...(*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, Pye 1978: 31)

> *nānaka satiguri bheṭiai pūrī hovai jugati.*
> *hasandiā khelandiā painandiā khavandiā viche hovai mukati.*
> (GGS: 522 M5: GjV: pa.16, sa.2).
> O Nānak, by meeting with the True-Gurū the perfect way of living occurs.
> Within laughing, playing, dressing, and eating occurs release.

Such seeming parallels suggest that the primarliy, though not exclusive, Buddhist notion could illuminate 'difficult' (nondual) passages of the GGS.[23] The Sikh Gurū's Word *prima facie* reveals intriguing parallels. Apart from the GGS using important Buddhist terms[24] it is more the overlap of an upayic thematic that provides the

[23] The general 'upayic' idea that 'every form reveals the truth or the divine', is ancient. The *Ṛg Veda* (VI.47) states about Indra, king of the gods: 'Of every form and every being, the likeness he has assumed; every form seeks to reveal him. His steeds are yoked, all ten hundred; Indra by his wizadry (*māyā*) travels in many forms'. (Cited by Olivelle 1996: 33).
[24] Such as: *upāya > upāu; śūnya > sunnu; nirvāṇa > nirabāṇu; tṛṣṇā > trisanā; karuṇā; buddhu; bodhi; lobha > lobhu; moha > mohu*.

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strongest argument for taking a Buddhist interpretive perspective seriously. It would be naive to suggest that the Sikh Gurūs employ such terms but change their meaning to such an extent that the Buddhist significations are totally lost, for such a viewpoint would have to ignore the underlying thematic overlaps. Indeed, Gurū Nānak's attitude can be likened to Gombrich's assessment of the Buddha's approach: 'one may conclude that the Buddha was against discussing theory in the abstract, that he did not pick arguments, and that when discussion arose he avoided head-on confrontation by adopting "skill-in-means"' (1996: 17). Gurū Nānak incorporated the terminology of others and entered into debates in a way that accepted diverse views and ways on one level, but on another, subordinated them to his own chief terms and understanding.[25] This required a certain hermeneutical ingenuity itself, but more strikingly, Gurū Nānak's cardinal terms (of the Word, Name and Gurū) themselves, it is argued, reflect a skilful means motif.

Furthermore, Sikh and Buddhist thought arguably share the same existential focus on karma. Gombrich notes, 'that just as Being lies at the heart of the Upanisadic world view, Action lies at the heart of the Buddha's' (1996: 48–9). (Mis)understanding Gurū Nānak's teachings within either a largely Christian (Neo-Platonic) or Hindu (Vedic-Upanisadic) framework as a metaphysics of Being has led to a crucial oversight concerning the importance Gurū Nānak himself attaches to action (*karamu*) and *praxis*. Gurū Nānak's Timeless Being (*akāla-purakhu*) is not understood independently from the action of the world-process. Therefore the existential focus of the 'heterodox' paradigm of Buddhism provides a more appropriate hermeneutic beginning than the onto-theological metaphysics of either a Hindu 'Brahman' or a Semitic 'God'. This thesis therefore aims to redress this skewed view by re-understanding Gurū Nānak's notion of *karamu* (Skt. *karma*) in terms of his teaching on the *praxis* of the Gurū's Word. The process 'foundation' of action therefore needs to be contextualised.

The theory of *karma* is developed from its Vedic roots within the bhakti movement most significantly by attributing the Supreme Being (whether Viṣṇu, Śiva or Devī) with the power to override any individual's karmic conditioning. The goal and means had changed dramatically from ancient times of appeasing the Vedic gods through elaborate ritual sacrifice, through internalisation of that sacrifice in the yogic meditation of the Upaniṣads, to finally erasing karmic impressions by the mere invocation of the Name of 'God' in the bhakti traditions.

Generally, *karma*, puts forward the idea that all human actions are seen to have consequences. Acting is not only upon the world but simultaneously upon oneself: to act is to be acted upon. Marriot elaborates the 'nondualistic' dimension of this process in contradistinction to Western ideas, by acknowledging that every actor's particular

[25] See, for example, his discussions with the Siddhas (GGS: 938–46, SG).

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nature is thought to be the result, as well as the cause, of their particular actions (*karma*). Such a view does not make the Western assumption of the 'separability of action from actor', body from mind (1976: 109–10). The Indian actor is not only externally conditioned but internally driven, and in such a way that the external is cyclically and causally related to the internal. The movement of this process demands a hermeneutic that goes beyond substance or essence ('man' or 'God/Brahman') alone, to one wherein substance is perpetually being reformulated in a process of unceasing actions. O'Flaherty argues that most theories of *karma* involve three basic constituents: '(1) causality (ethical or non-ethical, involving one life or several lives); (2) ethicization (the belief that good and bad acts lead to certain results in one life or several lives); (3) rebirth' (1980: xi).

However, one of the most significant aspects and developments has yet to be mentioned. A more philosophical, and eventually pervasive, understanding of *karma* arose from the *Bhagavadgītā*. Here Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna the way of desireless action (*niṣkāma-karma*) as a 'skill in actions' (2.50), understood as nonaction-in-action (4.18), where one is to perform actions without attachment to their possible results (4.18–23). All actions are thereby sacrificed to Kṛṣṇa, in the purity of the agent's motive (21.6), and because actions no longer bind, liberation (*mokṣa*) is secured. The shift from physical actions to their motivations brings into view the Buddhist understanding of *karma/kamma* which is solely focused on the inner intentions of the mind regardless of the public domain of caste/dharmic duties. For Buddhists only actions with intentions free of desire, hatred and delusion, are free of karmic consequence. Gurū Nānak's understanding emphasises both the Gītā's and the Buddhist concentration on the inner, but does not lose the ethical importance of the social and bhakti context of action via the nondual idea that Grace and the divine Order are inextricably tied to human action.

Thus continuing with this changed focus from ontological Being to existential Action, apart from the more direct indications about a 'horizontal' crossing (from this shore to the other), another important complication needs unravelling. Namely, that the world is viewed nondualistically, where dualities are literally turned on their head concerning 'good and bad' actions, 'virtue and vice', 'divine and human will'.[26] Given these nondual relations in the content of the GGS as well as within the tradition, Sikh thought also employs one of the most influential hermeneutical strategies used across Hindu (especially Advaita-Vedānta) and Buddhist (especially Mādhyamika) traditions – that of the two levels of truth and their inherent nonduality, which in both traditions

[26] Furthermore later Sikh *praxis* involves a number of key (and often neglected) nondual relations: Gurū Hargobind's two swords which represent both temporal and spiritual concerns together (*mīrī-pīrī*), and the extension of these views by Gurū Gobind Siṅgh's saintly or true-soldiers (*santa-sipāhī*).

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have been intimately related to skilful and unskilful means.[27] Generally a trope of these two truths can be traced from the Upaniṣads to the medieval Bhakti movements, in the two Brahmans (*saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*), the relative and absolute truths of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.[28] Thus, for example, for *Advaita Vedānta* 'all scriptures, all sentences, all words become recognised as the means for eternal knowledge because one realizes that God becomes manifest through all linguistic forms' (Timm 1992: 139). Furthermore any practice, 'drama, dance, music may become means to knowledge about God' (Timm 1992: 140). Even in the comparatively closed Pali 'Canon' of Theravāda, one of its *sūtras* states that:

> Whatever doctrines lead to awakening are thereby *dharma*, and are the word of the Teacher. (*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, *Part IV, Pali Text Society* 1958: 143; Smith 1993: 150–1).

These nondual relations between form and the Formless, between the world and the Absolute, between words and the Word, provide the necessary foundation for a skilful means thematic that both Hindu and Buddhist traditions exploit. And it has already been shown that Gurū Nānak makes much the same statements concerning the nonduality between speech (*bāṇī*) and the Word (*sabadu*) via the notion of the Gurū (*gura-bāṇī*/*gura-sabadu*). It is not unreasonable then, given the other shared nondualities, to assume, even expect, an upayic trope within the GGS.

Within this thesis 'skilful means' is consequently used in three ways: as expressive of a general theme that cuts across many Indian traditions (*upaya*), which can be seen to parallel Aristotle's *phronesis*; as a technical term of Buddhist soteriology (*upāya-kauśalya*); and finally, as a means, a contrivance as well as an uncontrived contrivance (*upāu*, *jugati*; *kalā*; *akalakalā*) in the GGS. It is this hermeneutic map of relations concerning the nondual inclusivity of the 'well spoken word' and its open-ended *praxis* that informs the w/Word in the early Sikh tradition. This is reflected literally in the inclusion of the works of sixteen other Sant and Sufi poet-saints and eighteen court-poets in the GGS,[29] as well as in the existential nature of the Sikh Word which pertains to pragmatic action. Thus as regards Gurū Nānak it is much more appropriate to talk about the authority of the Word (*gura-bāṇī*/*gura-sabadu*) not as a text of revealed truth, but as a *gura-sabadu* communication that reveals truth through its engaged *praxis*. Indeed, Laine (1983: 178) after discussing the notion of 'scripture' in modern Indian thought concludes, 'authority did not lie in the text as externally sanctioned, but in the experience it evoked...[Scriptures demand] a faith in the possibilities of human appropriation of truth'. Given the skilful means context, what

[27] For an example within the Hindu tradition, Mumme cites the Southern School of Srīvaiṣṇava teachers and Śaṅkara (1992: 76).
[28] See Sprung 1973 for an overview within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions.
[29] See Appendix 1.

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makes texts 'scripture', or words 'revelatory' are how they are appropriated in action. Therefore, to interpret the GGS's textual words for their abstract and universal meaning reflects a misguided, if not alien, hermeneutics. Rather, it is argued, the inherent aim of interpreting the GGS would seek to translate how those very words can effect self-transformation in application to one's lived experience. The GGS is an aid to the appropriation of truth (*saccu*) in lived *praxis*, not the truth in and of itself. This view is naturally challenging – it being far easier to locate the truth in the GGS as Gurū and venerate it independent of daily *praxis*, than to accept the difficult responsibility to be true (*saciāru*) in every action by applying its teaching.

1.5. Rationale of thesis structure

The thesis then proceeds by exploring and developing a contextual hermeneutic that takes into account Indian understandings of scripture as well as incorporating Gurū Nānak's own ideas on interpretation, and at the same time also locating these within suitable Western hermeneutic frames to acknowledge the diasporic Sikh context.

In the first part of the thesis Chapter 1 problematises the approach to Gurū Nānak's Word (*sabadu*) that misreads it as only the written words (*bāṇī*) of the GGS, by postulating a *gura-sabadu praxis*. Given the focus on the *praxis* of the Gurū's Word, and the need for a diasporic hermeneutics, Chapter 2 investigates an appropriate hermeneutics that reflects this *praxis*. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in its stress on history as well as its contrasting of *techne* and *phronesis* relates well with Gurū Nānak's understanding of *karamu*, as well as also paralleling the differences between meaningless *mantras* that only require repeating and the meaningful Word/Name that requires interpretation.

Chapter 3 draws a broader picture of the GGS's colonial and orientalist context and charts a brief history of interpretations of the GGS to locate the modernist assumptions and misinterpretations, particularly noting the monotheistic construction of Sikh thought and the bias to *theorise* it into a systematic theology. Not wanting to commit the same errors of past interpretations Chapter 4 thus provides a thorough overview of the North Indian context, with regard to key themes, terms and traditions to situate the GGS and develop a 'contextual hermeneutic' which incorporates the primacy of *praxis* but also internalises Gurū Nānak's own statements about interpreting the Word.

After the first part's analysis of the approach to the Word, the second part of the thesis aims to apply the developed contextual hermeneutic to re-understand Gurū Nānak's hymns beyond any fixed and 'complete' systematisation of them, by evidencing an appropriate and contemporary diasporic engagement. Chapter 5, following Benjamin's clues about translation as being non-transmitting, life-giving and

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word-focused, makes a detailed study of Gurū Nānak's vocabulary, teasing out a matrix of his major soteric terms, ideas and themes. These are then briefly explicated to delineate his world-view and also provide a context for the actual interpretations of his hymns that follow. Chapters 6 and 7 finally engage in direct interpretations of two major aspects of Gurū Nānak's *gura-sabadu praxis*, both of which are located in action. The former investigates the theme of action as a writing process, and the latter the themes of nonduality and *upaya*.

This thesis explicitly avoids the absolute recontextualisation of Gurū Nānak's teachings into English. Nor does it essentialise indigenous terms and constructs. Rather it attempts to reflect one meaningful cross-cultural encounter with the GGS, that details three almost completely overlooked, though central, themes in Gurū Nānak's thought which are juxtaposed with comparable Western ones. Thus to aid diasporic translations, and hermeneutic recontextualisations of Gurū Nānak's teachings into English, the themes used are nonduality (*avaru-na-dūjā*), *praxis* (*karamu-kamāi*) and *phronesis* (*upāya/upāu*, *yukati/jugati*). As such the thesis is an instance of engagement that challenges the finality of past formulations that have construed the teachings of the GGS as (only) monotheistic. By addressing the themes of nonduality and *upaya* in the GGS, both of which emphasise *praxis* and interpretation, it becomes apparent that the theologization of *guramati* into any abstract and universal doctrine is a questionable move. On the contrary the interpretive *praxis* argued for here indicates a space in which different, contemporary and contextually sensitive readings may develop. Here it is through a juxtaposition of Eastern and Western themes that an interpretation arises between the horizons of the Sikh text and those of a Western interpreter, which aims to hear the echo of Gurū Nānak's soteric speech five hundred years after it sounded.

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